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SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT SENDS SHEGUES TO WORK CAMP, RELEASES  
MINORS

REF: KINSHASA 1753

¶1. (U) MONUC's human rights division reported on November 15 that the number of apparently homeless persons rounded up by police following politically-inspired violence November 11 had grown to 505 from the original total of 337. The three hours of violence between supporters of presidential candidate Jean-Pierre Bemba and police was provoked by street gangs comprised of supposed homeless young men or boys known locally as "shegues" (ref A).

¶2. (U) MONUC told us that 269 men detained in the sweeps were flown November 18 to work camps at the National Service Center in Kanyama Kasese, Katanga. Local officials in Katanga quoted in the press protested that the men would be bad influences and were not welcome. A MONUC human rights team plans to visit the area as soon as possible to check on their welfare.

¶3. (U) The detainees in Kinshasa also included 143 minors, four mothers with children, 40 women, and 18 disabled people. DRC Interior Minister Denis Kalume, MONUC, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and Congolese NGOs agreed November 15 to release all 143 children to a private charity; UNICEF reported that six were subsequently reunited with their parents. Police also released the mothers, their children, and the disabled, as well as several others who presented evidence of employment or permanent residence.

¶4. (U) MONUC human rights officers assert that police actions in the case violated Congolese law, charging that the arrests were arbitrary and that arrested persons did not have access to lawyers and were neither charged nor released within 48 hours. They also noted that vagabondage, cited by Minister Kalume as legal grounds for arrest and possible trial, is a misdemeanor in the DRC and does not carry a prison term.

¶5. (U) Kinshasa newspapers reported November 20 that Herold Sadiki, Vice Minister of the Interior, stated that these "troublemakers would become useful to the nation" by increasing agricultural production. He promised they would be reinserted into society after their "apprenticeship." He proposed referring to the homeless population of the city as "citizens without permanent homes" (CSDF) rather than the slang term "shegues."

¶6. (SBU) Comment: Shegue gangs pose a legitimate crime problem in Kinshasa, but sending a handful into the countryside will not solve it. Kinshasa residents, plagued by rising crime and shegue-led violence, have raised no protests. End comment.

